

Chairperson's Report

As GL turns seven, we are more convinced than ever of the importance of the work we do. We also face the future with greater confidence, both as a result of our improved financial position, as well as the organisation's well earned reputation as a centre of hard work and excellence.

As I write this, GL has just received the wonderful news that it is one of 38 organisations around the globe that will be awarded funding over the next five years through the DFID Governance and Transparency Fund. In mid 2007, GL received a special commendation in the Driver's of Change Awards administered by the Southern Africa Trust (SAT) and the *Mail and Guardian*. A few months earlier, Vodacom and the Media Magazine named our Executive Director runner up in the South Africa Media Woman of the Year awards; a rare recognition of the work of a gender and media NGO by the media establishment.

Driving change

Excerpts from the award citation:

"While much is said and written about giving voice to the poor and marginalised, the majority of whom are women, GL is one of the few NGOs that has actively sought to do something about this.

GL has worked strategically and systematically to sensitise the mainstream media to the under representation of women's views and voices in the media through conducting research; training; creating and sharing content that demonstrates how gender can be integrated into media outputs; taking advantage of the opportunities presented by information technology and strengthening the communication skills on gender activists as well as women in decision-making. Through its gender justice programme, GL links activists and the media in campaigns to end gender violence."



Our outreach continues to extend well beyond the borders of even the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, especially through our website, list serve and cyber dialogues. Our 2007-2010 strategy identified six pillars to our work. I will address those that relate to our strategic positioning; partners and networks as well as sustainability. The Executive Director's report covers our Programme of Action; institutional growth and development as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Key focus areas of the GL Strategy 2007-2010

- Strategic positioning;
- Programme of action;
- Institutional growth and development;
- Partnerships and networks;
- Sustainability;
- Monitoring and evaluation.

The regional context

Southern Africa must confront a myriad of challenges as it attempts to address effectively the needs and aspirations of its people. Its greatest challenge continues to be the need to build a life for the people free from poverty, disease, human rights abuses, gender inequality and environmental degradation.



On the health front, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has become one of the major obstacles to sustainable development. The increased mortality and morbidity of prime-age adults caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic has brought wide ranging socio-economic impacts on all aspects of rural and urban livelihoods. This includes erosion of productivity in the work place, food security and the livelihood asset base, decreased access to education and other productive assets thereby exacerbating poverty.

At a social level, migration has become an important and divisive issue in the region. The major economy in Southern Africa, South Africa, was host to 40,000 refugees and asylum seekers in the year 2000. By 2004, this number had more than doubled to 104,000. The ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe continues to generate mass movements of people within the region, while thousands of southern Africans seek other opportunities in the UK, US and elsewhere. Southern Africa must address the situation of large-scale movement of people through domestic and regional institutional instruments including SADC and NEPAD.

Economically, Southern Africa countries continue to struggle with the challenges of economic development and most of them will not meet the targets set by the Millennium Declaration for 2015. Much like the rest of Africa, the challenges



confronting Southern Africa's economies come from two inter-related sources: (a) constraints imposed by the international economic and political order within which our economies operate; and (b) domestic weaknesses deriving from socio-economic and political structures and neo-liberal structural adjustment policies not adjusted for local conditions.

The main elements of the hostile global order include, first, the fact that southern African economies are integrated into the global economy as exporters of primary commodities and importers of manufactured products, leading to terms of trade losses. Reinforcing this, secondly, have been the policies of liberalization, privatization and deregulation as well as an unsound package of macro-economic policies imposed through structural adjustment conditionality by the World Bank and the IMF. These have now been institutionalised within the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

through rules, agreements and procedures, which are biased against our countries.

These external and internal policies and structures have combined to generate unsustainable and unjustifiable debt burdens for some of the southern African countries. This has crippled the affected economies and undermined their capacity and their ownership of strategies for development.

Poverty remains a major challenge for the region. Governments in the region have not made a dent in the persistent poverty that affects the majority of the people of southern Africa.

Just as Southern Africa appeared to be emerging from decades of conflict, Zimbabwe has been cast into turmoil through greed and the breakdown of the rule of law, virtually bankrupting one of the region's richest and most promising nations. The recent spate of xenophobic violence in South Africa is a reminder of the tensions that simmer beneath the veneer of a united region. And South Africa itself is in its most uncertain state since 1994 as the man who seems set to take over as president in 2009 also faces charges of corruption. Jacob Zuma was acquitted of rape charges in a controversial case that nonetheless found his behaviour less than becoming of a future head of state of a country that has among the most progressive provisions for gender equality.

Patriarchy and democracy coexist

As fellow board member Thenjiwe Mtintso often points out, patriarchy and democracy are still comfortable bedfellows. Patriarchy is not an ideological construct. It is a violent system as experienced vividly in the mind boggling number of women and children who are raped in our society. It is a system that entrenches economic inequality, as supported by statistics showing that the feminisation of poverty continues, particularly in rural areas, working class communities and among the unemployed. The fact that women are the worst hit by HIV and AIDS is directly attributable to the unequal power relations between women and men.

Strategic positioning

GL began as a gender and media organisation that grew into the governance and justice areas, both still closely linked to the media work. Following an evaluation in 2005, we pondered each of these programme areas, and agreed in the end that GL had a strategic niche in all of them. During this year, these programme areas have developed a unique place in GL work as well as leveraging new work and resources of their own. Budget wise, the media programme accounts for approximately half our work, while the governance and justice portfolio account for the other half. However, the latter have successfully leveraged new resources for GL and are the bedrock of our advisory services (media still do not pay for gender work!)

GL can now genuinely claim to have a POA that - though presented in silos - is more like a spider's web; each programme feeds off and into the other. This year, for example, we will start our round of newsroom training on gender and politics. It's part of the media training programme; but equally part of the governance programme. It will generate stories for the Opinion and Commentary Service; contacts for the data base; photos for the photo library and entries for the gender and media awards. It will be another entry point for the Media Action Plan on HIV and AIDS and Gender (MAP); and a chance to talk about the National Action Plans (NAPs) to end gender violence.

We can also now genuinely claim to have work that stretches from the local, to the national, to the regional, to the global. The saying: act locally, reach out regionally and think globally has real meaning in our work.

Heeding the winds of change

One of the strengths that GL has been able to draw on up to now is its location in South Africa, with its progressive democratic traditions and exemplary constitutional provisions on gender equality.

No matter what happens in the 2009 elections, South Africa will never be quite the same. Gender justice NGOs like GL would do well not to bend to, but to heed the winds of change.



The 50/50 campaign has and will continue to be a pillar of our work. But it is clear that this is not enough. Women in the African National Congress (ANC) failed to even advocate, let alone vote for a woman leader at the landmark December 2007 congress. A new careerism and populism has gripped the country. Women leaders are far from immune.

What this means is that we have to move beyond the 50/50 slogan. We need to be prepared to critique women in power. We need to advocate not just the presence of women in politics but feminist perspectives in decision-making. We need to look for new leadership, like (radio and TV personality) Redi Direko leading a march against women being stripped and violated at taxi ranks because they wear mini-skirts. We need to identify the new sites of power within the ANC.

We need to identify where and how we establish tactical alliances for advancing our work; at the same time identifying when it is necessary to pull back and be critical. We have not lost our power. We just need to know when and how to use it.

(Excerpts from a presentation by Board member Ferial Haffajee, also editor of the Mail and Guardian, at the 2008 GL Board meeting.)



Refining our vision and mission

light of the changes around us and within our own organisation, we felt it prudent to revisit our vision and mission at the 2008 Board meeting.

Our vision - of a Southern Africa in which women and men are free to realise their potential in both their private and public lives - remains as valid as ever.



But we found our mission needed expanding. When we started out with the slogan "promoting gender equality in and through the media" we had a dedicated focus on the media. Our horizons have since expanded. Our governance and justice work is growing. So we have amended our slogan to "Gender links for equality and justice" (with a deliberate play, of course, on the "links" that are our strongest branding).

Our new mission statement (ironically much shorter!) captures our three programme areas and commits GL to:

- Promote gender equality in and through the media and in all areas of governance.
- Conduct effective campaigns for ending gender violence, HIV and AIDS.
- Build the capacity of women and men to engage critically in democratic processes that advance equality and justice.

Dr Athalia Molokomme - Deputy Chair and AG of Botswana

Governance

The 2005 evaluation highlighted governance as one of GL's strongest points. The recommendations made have been followed through. The Board increased in size by two people. Following the last board meeting we had a change of leadership. I took over as chairperson. The transition took place smoothly. Exco has met four times and overseen the day to day work of GL, including staff changes; extensions to the premises and key fund raising initiatives. GL remains committed to strong governance. We cannot be in the good governance business and be found wanting on any count! What is happening in our region is a good illustration of why clean and consistent governance is essential from institutional to country level.

Looking ahead: vision 2020

Our overall positioning requires constant re-examination. Even as we implement the current three year strategy, we need to plan for what happens after 2010, because the lead time for planning and fund raising is long. During our Board meeting in March 2008, the Board agreed to convene a special "visioning" meeting

ahead of its next meeting in March 2009. What we would like to do is look as far ahead as 2020. To avoid 2020 vision we need to have a vision for 2020!

During our Board meeting, my colleague Dr Pinkie Mekgwe mooted the possibility of GL spreading its wings beyond Southern Africa. As I write we are planning our first satellite offices in Gaborone, Botswana, and Port Louis, Mauritius. We have also taken the decision to start an endowment fund that will help to secure our future (see also financial report). These are indeed giant steps for our young organisation.

Time to spread our wings?

Gender Links has naturally been cautious in its early years. When starting a new venture there is wisdom in making haste slowly. But the time may soon be coming for us to spread our wings.



From our solid base in the English speaking countries of Southern Africa we have used our base in Mauritius to start work in Madagascar and DRC. Requests for assistance are coming in from French speaking countries in West Africa.

English speaking West African countries such as Ghana and Liberia are experiencing a turn around. The time is right for a strong Pan African gender movement. Who is playing that role? How can it be strengthened? How can GL leverage the knowledge and tools that it has developed, especially in its niche area - the media - to extend its work to other parts of Africa? We should not hesitate to explore how we can use our ever expanding networks to venture into other parts of the continent.

- Dr Pinkie Mekgwe, Board Member

I wish to thank the Executive Director and staff for their hard work; as well as my colleagues on the Board for their dedication and insight. GL would never be where it is today without the support of its donors and partners, many of whom have been with us over several years. Thank you; we hope that you will continue to journey with us as we pursue our vision of a region in which women and men are able to realise their full potential in both their public and private lives.

Dr Muna Ndulo
Chair, Gender Links.